

Models of Multiracial Churches

Churches across the country are being confronted with similar issues. Neighborhood demographics are changing and their members are aging or moving away. The world is changing around us and the church needs to respond to these changes in a way that follows Jesus' example. The path that a church follows to respond to these changes is very dependent on the situation and location in which they find themselves. As congregations are dealing with changing neighborhoods, they have some choices to make.

George Yancey, in his book *One Body, One Spirit*, describes four categories of multiracial churches. I would like to discuss each one of these and provide some methods that have been used to transition churches into multiracial churches. I would also like to provide an example, some of them local, of each type of church so that you can explore and visit these places in order to experience for yourselves what some churches are doing to respond to the changes in our world. The four categories of multiracial churches are leadership driven, evangelism driven, demographic driven and network driven.¹

Leadership driven churches typically begin due to the vision of the pastor or a group of key leaders in the church. A pastor recognizes that his/her church is in the midst of a changing neighborhood and develops a vision to reach out to the multiracial community that surrounds the church. The church members catch the leader's vision of a multiracial church and "tend to perceive the multiracial nature of the church as being ordained by God."² As more and more church members catch the vision, the effort becomes more team-oriented. This team effort

¹ George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 51.

² Ibid, 52.

enables the church to be more effective in their mission. Some ways that churches can accomplish becoming multiracial under the leadership driven category are:

- The merger of two churches – A group of minority people from a small church request to join a larger mostly white church for various reasons – financial, building or leadership needs. The smaller group ends up getting assimilated into the larger group with little voice or representation in decision-making in the church.
- The partnership with one or more other churches – Two or more churches collaborate to start a new church or ministry. Calvary Reformed, Holland Heights CRC and Niekerk CRC joined together to start Heights of Hope to minister to the needs in their community.
- A core group branches off from the parent church and begins a new church in the same area or in a different neighborhood. Imagine Fellowship CRC in Holland is a new church plant that branched off from another Christian Reformed Church and is led by a core group from the parent church.
- Key leaders move into an area in order to start a new church – Gail Heffner who spoke to our class moved into a specific neighborhood in Pittsburgh along with other key people to start a new church in that targeted area.
- Two denominations partner together to start a multiracial church - Maple Avenue Ministries in Holland and Angel Community Church in Muskegon are examples of the partnership of the CRC and RCA denominations.

Evangelism driven multiracial churches come about through an intentional effort to reach out to members of other races in their community. Bus ministry and Vacation Bible School are two examples of programs that intentionally reach out to a racially diverse neighborhood. These churches have a strong commitment to mission and outreach. When new members join the church as a result of these outreach efforts, leadership development must be a priority so that the church will begin to reflect the people whom they want to reach. Some ways that churches can become evangelism driven multiracial churches are:

- Start a new church plant in an urban location where the denomination is not currently represented. The RCA website describes their mission of church multiplication in this way: “The strategic vision for church multiplication in the RCA includes developing "parent church" networks of existing churches that will plant new congregations in the future. Healthy churches reproduce and multiply.” Christ Memorial Church in Holland, Michigan has started a new church plant on

the northside of Holland and is incorporating some Spanish language into that church's worship and ministries.

- Begin to identify and meet needs in the community or address social justice issues such as poverty, homelessness, segregation, and crime. The ministry of the Voice of Calvary ministry in Mississippi which we read about in the book "More Than Equals" tackles social justice issues. See the Christian Community Development Association website (www.cdda.org) for more information. Another website that is dedicated to educating Christians about social justice issues is www.urbanministry.org.

The third category of multiracial churches is the demographic driven churches. These are churches that find themselves in a neighborhood that is changing demographically. They are not necessarily driven to start a multiracial church but they have found themselves in the middle of an area that is rapidly changing. Sometimes these churches find that there are many immigrants moving into the area which creates a language barrier. Often, the church will develop multiple congregations. Some ways that churches can become demographic driven multiracial churches are:

- The renting model - One group will rent the church from an existing congregation. This provides much-needed funds for a church that is struggling financially because of declining membership. It allows the smaller group to worship in their own language and in their own style. This sometimes results in a few joint services but there is typically little interaction between the two groups.
- The two service model: Another way to incorporate a smaller minority group is to hold two services. One service can be in English and one in the native language of the majority of the immigrants. One example is the church from the Los Angeles area that was one of the case studies in the book, *Against All Odds*. In the Christian Reformed Church, there are many totally separate congregations that worship in their native languages such as Laotian, Cambodian or Korean.

The last category of multicultural churches that George Yancey describes in his book, are called network driven multicultural churches. He describes network driven multiracial churches as churches that "developed due to the expansion of social networks within the church. Social networks are the family and friends that people have in their lives. Americans can develop social networks through the people they know from work, school, social clubs and neighborhoods, as

well as their churches... Through these networks, individuals may be introduced to a church and persuaded to visit and perhaps join that church.³ What may also help network driven multiracial churches grow is the increase in interracial marriages. These churches are a comfortable place for interracial couples to worship and feel welcome. Yancey says that this type of multiracial church is most likely to grow, possibly because visitors to the church already have a connection to the church because an acquaintance or coworker invited them. These churches

- focus on relationships especially targeting young urban adults. Mosaic churches do this extremely well. The first Mosaic church started in Los Angeles but the idea has spread throughout the country. You can explore more about the Mosaic Life church in Grand Rapids by visiting their website at www.mosaiclife.org.

Since these type of churches are more likely to succeed in becoming multiracial, I wanted to learn more about Mosaic churches. Gerardo Marti has written a book called “A Mosaic of Believers” which describes how the church in Los Angeles intentionally worked on becoming multiracial and succeeded. Part of the success just came from being located in a large city that has a youthful and diverse population and that has a large artistic community where people are more likely to accept social change. He describes five distinct havens that Mosaic churches intentionally develop in order to attract multiracial members to their church.

The first haven is a theological haven. Mosaic Church is associated with the Southern Baptist Convention but its worship services are distinctly unique. “Mosaic sometimes performs its activities in unconventional ways, yet affirms orthodox beliefs. The affirmation of conservative beliefs combined with a more open, relevant expression of contemporary culture in public worship services is a unique haven cultivated by Mosaic.”⁴ Becoming multiracial does not mean that a church needs to change its theology but to embrace the theology of unity in diversity.

³ Ibid, 59.

⁴ Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church*. (Bloomington: IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 8.

The second haven the Mosaic Church is the artistic haven. “Mosaic encourages artists to practice their craft through the public celebration services and initiates projects that stimulate artists to be purposefully creative in community with each other.”⁵ Many different musical styles, artistic talents, dance, video production and graphic design are used throughout the worship service and within the church. Some have complained that the service looks more like an entertainment venue and doesn’t focus enough on the Word. Mosaic feels as if it should welcome anyone who has a gift to contribute as long as it meets the goals of the church.

The third haven that Mosaic churches develop is the innovator haven. “Mosaic is also a refuge for people who in other churches have been called maverick, rebels or freaks. These are catalysts, change-friendly and change-initiating individuals interested in making a distinctive mark in the world.” They are “individuals who want to change the world, who want to make a difference.”⁶ This situation may be difficult in that it is hard to manage and supervise a group of people who are all mavericks and who want to change everything and do it their way. The fourth haven is the age haven. Many who come to Mosaic “are escaping from churches dominated by ‘old people’.”⁷ They want to find a place where their voices are heard even though they are young and where they have a chance to be leaders in ministry. This trend toward “youth-orientation” has led many older members to feel as if they have no place there and are not valued for their contribution to the church.

The last haven that Mosaic church provides is an ethnic haven. Recent immigrants often gravitate to a church that worships in their own language but second and third generation immigrants are looking for a different experience that Mosaic tries to provide. “Within the broadly Americanized culture of Mosaic, they find refuge for ‘being’ ethnic without having to ‘act’ ethnic. This ethnic haven is also attractive to Caucasians who value diversity because it

⁵ Ibid, 8.

⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁷ Ibid, 10.

offers them a safe place to mingle with various peoples and cultures without an excessive burden of constant cultural adjustments.”⁸ They would rather focus on the common identity that believers have as followers of Christ instead of a particular ethnic identity.

Whatever model that a church decides to use, there are several characteristics that are common to all multiracial churches. Multiracial churches are intentionally concerned with reconciliation and justice. The church and its staff work together as a team and respects each other. And lastly, there is a strong commitment to mission and outreach.

⁸ Ibid, 11.

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Interview #1
Racism in the Church
February 25, 2008
Judy Tiemeyer

Chris G. is a Caucasian friend of mine whom I met at work about eight years ago. At the time she was married to an African American man. She was raised in a CRC church in Grand Rapids but since her parents moved to Holland, neither her parents nor Chris had found a church home. After Chris had her two girls, one who looks Caucasian and one who looks African American, she decided to go church shopping. Her husband wasn't very interested in church, so she visited a few churches by herself without any family along.

This was her story regarding that experience. She attended one church for about two weeks and people were friendly. They spoke to her, welcomed her, and shook her hand. After attending for two weeks, she decided to bring her family to church. She felt an immediate difference in their treatment of her when she was with her husband and children who looked different from her. No one spoke to them or tried to make them feel welcome. She noticed it particularly because she had received a different welcome when she was there by herself. One of the biggest things she noticed was that people would not even make eye contact with them. They never went back and in fact it was several years before she tried to look for a church again.

Because we met at work, she knew where I attended church and decided that she would try our church. I didn't even know that she was coming that morning until I spotted her in church. She had come with her children and wasn't with me when she walked into our church. She relates that she was welcomed warmly and people were not reluctant to make eye contact or speak with her. She decided to join our church because of the reception that she received there. Her husband was also welcomed into our church and attended for awhile. Due to his problem

with alcoholism, she has since divorced her African American husband and now is married to a Mexican American and they have a child together. He also felt welcomed into our church and has made profession of faith and joined the church. Making eye contact and being willing to talk to people who are visiting, regardless of their race, seems to be an important factor in choosing a church.

A few years ago, our church decided to actively pursue hiring a person of color to join the staff. When Angela Taylor Perry was being considered for the position, she preached during a morning worship service. After the service, Chris' ten-year-old daughter who looks African American went up to Angela and hugged her and said "You look like me!" That shows the importance of a dominantly white church having a person of color on staff.

Interview #2

My second interview was with Patricia S. who is an African American student at Western Seminary. While she was growing up and in early adulthood, she said that she didn't want to deal with the racism that she saw because she was too busy trying to survive and battle her problem with addiction. Her first assumption just like those around her was that all whites were racists so any action that might be thought of as discrimination fueled a hatred for all whites. She didn't feel like confronting any racism that she saw because she felt that she was guilty of stereotyping whites just as she felt they were stereotyping her.

After graduating from West Michigan Teen Challenge, she came to Holland and started attending Holland Christian Congregation (a pseudonym). At the time, they had a black pastor but the congregation was predominantly white. While the people thought that he was a charismatic speaker, they didn't like the decisions he made and his leadership style. He was also

accused of messing up the finances of the church and about half of the people in the congregation left. She felt like some racist issues were involved in the conflict that went on with that pastor. Some people didn't want to give an African American the power of leadership in the church and so made it impossible for him to stay.

Patricia is now interning at a Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. While she feels comfortable there, she says that it doesn't feel like home. She has been there since September and no one has invited her to dinner after the service which she would expect in an African American church. She feels isolated because there are no other African Americans in the church. The church has stated that they want to embrace the community but don't really want to invite the people of their neighborhood to come to their church. They have openly stated that they want to be involved in outreach and by this they mean tutoring programs, food pantry and financial assistance but they aren't really interested in being a diverse congregation.

Racism Class
Judy Tiemeyer
March 22, 2008

Multicultural Ministry Observation

Wayne and Ruth Coleman, an African American couple, have been working with the poor in Holland for a long time. They have run Core City Christian Development Corp. for many years and have provided services such as budget counseling, emergency financial assistance, a food pantry, a Christian alcoholics anonymous support group, an ex-offenders support group and after-school tutoring for at risk kids. They have recently decided to narrow their focus to two areas. Ruth is graduating this spring from GVSU with an MSW and hopes to work with at-risk kids in the schools. Wayne is feeling called to plant a new church in Holland that reflects the diversity of the population. It is supported by Classis Holland of the Christian Reformed Church. At this point, there is a lot of planning going on behind the scenes but they also have begun to meet for a Bible study and prayer time on Tuesday evenings.

The church will be named Imagine Fellowship and its mission is to “preach the good news of the kingdom of God that will liberate the captive, bring life change, and transform communities that will reveal His kingdom come in the city.” Their seven-point vision is as follows:

1. **I**nstruct so that people rise from burned out hopes and faulty lifestyles to enjoy the privileges and promises God has for us through Christ.
2. **M**ove people from despair and brokenness to hope, faith and love.
3. **A**dopt lifestyles of integrity that are above reproach, and minister by precept and example as born-again, Spirit-filled believers.
4. **G**o into the Holland community and make disciples.
5. **I**nvest our God-given gifts and talents into the lives of our youth, families and communities to provide the ministry of restoration.
6. **N**urture believers through sound doctrine in becoming mature people of God.

7. Equip and empower believers to use their gifts and calling to become agents of change who partner with Christ to reveal the expression of His kingdom in the city.

Imagine Fellowship begins its Tuesday night meeting with prayer requests. There are requests for prayer for jobs and the economy, for the church itself, for those who are incarcerated, and for praise for answered prayers. We also prayed for the integrity of pastors everywhere so that the message of salvation can be unhindered by human behavior. It was interesting because out of the twenty people there, my husband and I were only two of four white people there. I am becoming more comfortable with being a minority, but I have noticed that I have to intentionally put myself in those situations. I am rarely surprised to be a minority – I have to decide to put myself in those situations.

The focus of this church is towards social justice based on what God's Word says about helping the poor. They want to empower families & youth spiritually and well as physically and economically. They want to develop Christian leaders from the minority groups in Holland. They want to provide assistance to those in need whenever possible and also be committed to racial reconciliation. Wayne feels that this vision can best be addressed through starting a new church instead of trying to bring this vision to an existing church. It takes a lot of time and effort to get to know a new congregation and even more time and effort to help them catch a vision that you have that may conflict with tradition in an existing church. One problem that I see is that while Wayne's goal is start a church that reflects the diversity of Holland, most of his contacts are African American. We were one of two couple there who were white and there were no Hispanics there. Crossing racial lines no matter which way you are going is not easy. It's a long, tough road to follow no matter which way a church decides to pursue diversity and reconciliation.

Annotated Bibliography of
Five Organizations' Websites
Judy Tiemeyer

1. <http://www.crcna.org/pages/racerelations.cfm>

This is a page on the Christian Reformed Church website that explains what their Office on Race Relations offers to churches. As the website says “the ministry of Race Relations has been mandated by the Christian Reformed Church to eradicate racism, develop multiethnic leaders and promote reconciliation.”

The Office of Race Relations offers many opportunities for churches to educate themselves about the issue of racism in the church. They offer DORR training (Dance of Racial Reconciliation) which seeks to train leaders in the church, both ordained and lay leaders, “to recognize, expose, and dismantle racism in all its forms and to experience true biblical reconciliation as a diverse and unified people of God.” They also sponsor a number of seminars and conferences throughout the year. There is a biannual Multiethnic Conference which will be held at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL in June of 2009, an annual Women of the Nations Retreat that was held in April of 2008 at Eastern Ave. CRC in Grand Rapids, and the Black and Reformed Conference that will be held in April 2008 in Kalamazoo, MI. They also offer a Race Relations Powerpoint Presentation that can be downloaded and used by churches. Contact Estaban Luga at lugoe@crcna.org for further information about these seminars.

The CRC denomination has realized that racial reconciliation will not happen by itself and so they have made it a priority by hiring people whose job it is to “eradicate racism, develop multiethnic leaders and promote reconciliation.” They also recognize the difficulty of their task and recognize that racism is a sin and must be confronted within our churches. This website gives many resources to help churches on their journey of racial reconciliation.

2. <http://www.rca.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=3129&srcid=3126>

This website is hosted by the Reformed Church in America and describes their efforts at addressing the issue of racism in the church. They have hired Earl James (ejames@rca.org) as the coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice. He has developed an assessment tool called the Continuum of Multiracial/Multiethnic/Multicultural Congregational Living. After answering a few questions about your church and you as an individual, you can place your congregation and yourself on this continuum. Then it lists some ways to help you and your congregation move from where you are to the next phase on the continuum. This is helpful because it doesn't browbeat you about where you are on the continuum but just encourages you to move forward from the point where you are right now.

The RCA church also provide Crossroad Anti-racism Training and provides a link to their website which provides information regarding workshops and training. It also provides a link to Project Implicit which is an assessment tool to determine where our blind spots are in regards to racism. In the section called Managing Change, there are even more links to helpful websites and contact information if you would like a coach to help you through this journey. In addition, this website includes resources such as a bibliography of books and articles concerning racism and some workshops or events that are planned for the future as well as some free worship resources that churches may use.

3. <http://www.fmc-canada.org/intercultural/intercultural-index.html>

This website is sponsored by the Free Methodist Church in Canada. If you go to this website, you will see a link on the left to a pdf file entitled “Principles for Developing Multicultural Churches.” This booklet answers some frequently asked questions about the hows and whys of developing multicultural churches. Some of the issues that they address are:

- What is the biblical basis for the multicultural church model?
- What is a multicultural church?
- What are the models of intercultural churches?
- Why are multicultural churches needed?
- Where are multicultural churches needed?
- Who is suited to lead a multicultural church?
- How does a church transition to multicultural?
- How should multicultural churches be planted?

This booklet addresses a lot of key questions that pastors and church leaders ask themselves when confronted with the question of multicultural churches. The final page of this booklet gives a resource list of books that addresses topics such as urban ministry, intercultural communications, multicultural ministry, and theology and diversity. This website link to the booklet on “Principles for Developing Multicultural Churches” gives a good overall background to those who are just beginning to consider this possibility for their church.

4. <http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/>

This website provides information for all types of church plants but also has some specific links to information about multicultural church plants entitled “A Guide for Planting Multicultural Churches.” The site is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Church Convention. While addressing some of the same questions as the Free Methodist churches website cited above, it also lists nine different ways that multicultural churches can be started. They are:

- Pioneering – A church planter begins with a core group and builds the church through evangelistic efforts.
- Branching – A core group breaks off from the parent church and stays in the same area.
- Colonizing – A core group intentionally relocates from the mother church to plant a new church.
- Seeding – When key lay leaders move and core groups form in the new community.
- Adopting – Core groups and/or churches who approach a partnering church for help are embraced.
- Partnering – Several churches work in a cooperative venture to start a new church.
- Revitalizing – A flickering church work is taken over and restarted at the same site.
- Transplanting – This method is when a church building is sold and the congregation relocates to several new starts.
- Catalyzing – An apostolic leader sparks multitudes of new churches.

This link to multicultural church planting also includes a nine-step plan to planting a multicultural church. It includes a resource list of books at the end to provide more in-depth study of this topic.

5. <http://www.mosaiclife.org/>

This is the website of a specific congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan. “Mosaic LiFE Church is a diverse gathering of people that God brings together to form a ‘gorgeous mosaic.’ Our world is broken in many ways; people are divided by race, injuries, economics and national borders. We desire to find unity with others through Jesus Christ. We welcome people from all walks of life, regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey. Be a part of Mosaic LiFE, and discover how [God fits all the pieces together](#) !”

They have a section on their website that lists four steps to healing and reconciliation: confession, repentance, reconciliation and restitution. The pictures on the website include people of many different ethnicities. Their website states that “Mosaic Life Church is a spiritually diverse community of faith, a racially diverse community of love, and an instrument of transformation and voice of hope.” This is a great website that shows you how one church has taken on the task of racial reconciliation and multicultural worship. Since it is a local congregation, it would be beneficial to experience this church in person.